Gas shortages trigger protests in Quetta amid severe cold

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Prolonged gas shortages amid a severe cold spell triggered protests in parts of the provincial capital on Saturday, as residents blocked roads and burned tyres against low pressure and supply suspensions, while Siberian winds continued to lash Quetta and other towns in northern and central parts of the province following rain and snowfall last week.

The severe cold has reduced gas supply in several areas, causing serious difficulties for residents trying to keep their homes warm. The Sui Southern Gas Company (SSGC) has been implementing loadshedding in Quetta and surrounding areas from midnight to 5am.

People in Kalat, Mastung, Ziarat, Pishin and several other areas are also facing similar gas shortages amid the ongoing cold spell.

However, residents say many localities in the provincial capital and its outskirts are not receiving gas properly even outside these hours. "We are getting gas for a very limited time without any timetable," Mehmood Khan, a resident of the Sariab area, told *Dawn*, adding that the situation worsened after winter rain and snowfall on the mountains surrounding the Quetta valley.

Several localities in the main city area are also facing low or no gas supply from SSGC as temperatures plunged to between minus five and minus seven degrees Celsius. "We have no option but to purchase gas cylinders to keep our houses warm and for cooking," Mansoor Ahmed, a resident of the posh Samungli Housing Scheme, said.

Amid the worsening situation, residents of the Sariab area, who have been facing the most severe gas shortages, staged a protest against low gas pressure and prolonged supply suspensions. Protesters burned tyres and erected barricades, blocking the road and bringing all types of traffic to a complete halt.

The protest came during an intense cold spell, with citizens facing severe hardship due to reduced gas pressure. The temperature in Quetta dropped to minus three degrees Celsius, while in Kalat it plunged to minus eight degrees Celsius.

Over the past several days of extreme cold, people in Quetta and surrounding areas — particularly the elderly, women and children — have been suffering because of gas shortages and outages.

Protesters said they had repeatedly informed SSGC officials about the low gas pressure, but no action was taken. In response, residents blocked the main Sabzal Road by burning tyres and placing obstacles, demanding the immediate restoration of adequate gas supply.

They said gas pressure in Killi Ferozabad and adjoining areas had dropped significantly, compounding their difficulties during the harsh winter.

FO warns against travel to Iran amid unrest

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movement sparked by anger over the rising cost of living, leading to authorities imposing internet restrictions. After a night of violent unrest, the Iranian authorities indicated on Saturday that they could intensify their crackdown on the biggest anti-government demonstrations in years, as the death toll rose to 65.

The Iranian army and the Revolutionary Guards blamed the unrest on terrorists, vowing to safeguard the governing system.

According to *Al Jazeera*, the Iranian army said it would safeguard strategic infrastructure and public property as it urged Iranians to thwart "the enemy's plots".

As per a statement quoted by the Doha-based outlet, the military accused Israel and "hostile terrorist groups" of seeking to "undermine the country's public security". The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, which operates separately from the army, warned that safeguarding the 1979 revolution's achievements and the country's security was a "red line", the outlet reported.

Iran-US row

The protests have once again posed one of the biggest challenges to the Iranian authorities, although Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has blamed the United States for the unrest.

In a speech broadcast on state TV, he said US President Donald Trump's hands "are stained with the blood of more than a thousand Iranians", in apparent reference to Israel's June war against the republic, which the US supported and joined with strikes of its own.

For his part, Mr Trump issued a new warning to Iran's leaders on Friday, saying: "You better not start shooting because we'll start shooting too."

UN-mandated mission

Meanwhile, the UN-mandated independent human rights fact-finding mission on Iran has urged authorities to immediately restore internet access and halt the crackdown.

The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran said it was alarmed by reports that security forces had been ordered to carry out a decisive crackdown without restraint.

However, it also underscores that threats or acts of unilateral military intervention by third states are "contrary to international law".

Established by the UN Human Rights Council in 2022, the fact-finding mission is mandated to investigate alleged human rights violations in Iran. Its mandate was extended in April 2025 for a further year to examine allegations of recent and ongoing human rights violations.

Later, President Trump said the US was "ready to help" as protesters in Iran faced an intensifying crackdown. "Iran is looking at FREEDOM, perhaps like never before. The USA stands ready to help!!!" Trump said in a social post on Truth Social, without elaborating.

His comments come a day after he said that Iran was in "big trouble" and again warned that he could order military strikes.

With additional input from agencies

PM forms panel to review progress of KP projects

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solutions to those issues. A detailed discussion was also held on the overall political situation in the province and the challenges faced by the public. Matters related to public welfare, development projects and governance were discussed as well.

'Lack of governance'

The participants informed the prime minister that the provincial government had completely failed due to a lack of governance.

They said the provincial government had no clear policy regarding health, education, infrastructure or public welfare and was paying little attention to resolving public issues.

The PM urged public representatives to prioritise the resolution of public problems, adding that he had recently distributed laptops, on merit, among male and female students across KP in Haripur.—APP

Pakistan-US military exercise commences

'Inspired Gambit 2026' to hone marksmanship skills during urban warfare

Dawn Report

PAKISTAN-US bilateral joint military exercise, 'Inspired Gambit 2026', aims to focus on the counterterrorism domain, involving professional contingents from the armies of both countries.—Courtesy ISPR

ISLAMABAD: The 13th Pakistan-US bilateral joint military exercise — 'Inspired Gambit 2026' — has kicked off with a focus on counterterrorism, the military's media wing said on Saturday.

In a statement, Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that the two-week-long exercise will focus on the "counterterrorism domain, involving professional contingents from the armies of Pakistan and the US".

Officials from both sides attended the opening ceremony, it said, adding that the joint exercise was being held at the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) in the Pabbi area of Kharian.

"The exercise is aimed at enhancing mutual understanding and interoperability through the sharing of counterterrorism experiences, while further refining tactics, techniques, and procedures essential for effective CT operations," the ISPR said.

"Emphasis is being laid on marksmanship skills during urban warfare, as well as on understanding each other's operational doctrines and best practices," it added.

The military's media wing termed the exercise of "vital importance", stressing its role in "addressing evolving security challenges, improving professional military standards, and strengthening the capacity of both forces to operate in complex counterterrorism environments".

"'Inspired Gambit 2026' reflects the continued commitment of Pakistan and the US towards collaborative efforts for peace and stability," it added.

TTAP urges protests on election anniversary

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of "Heroes of Democracy". He said such judges should eventually be restored all the privileges they had given up in their struggle to uphold the Constitution, judiciary and courts.

Responding to a question, Mr Achakzai said Pakistan could approach the United Nations to convene a round-table conference involving Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and China to discuss issues and find solutions. "No country alone can find and implement solutions," he added.

Allama Nasir Abbas said the "powerful" were blocking all avenues for reform and denying people their right to protest. "If the powerful block all ways to bring reforms, the people will rise to dismantle the oppressive system," he warned. He said the martial laws imposed by Gen Ziaul Haq, Gen Pervez Musharraf and the current "undeclared martial law" were responsible for abrogating the Constitution.

Calling on people to join the movement, he said the TTAP had been launched to restore the Constitution and empower citizens to claim their due rights.

Ammar Ali Jan formally announced his party's decision to join the TTAP movement for the restoration of the Constitution and democracy. He lamented that parliament had been rendered dysfunctional, the judiciary weakened and the media shackled. He said the country's GDP was stagnant, more than 40 per cent of the population lived below the poverty line, educated and skilled youth were leaving the country, while a few companies were earning billions of dollars in profits.

He said the people of Pakistan had the right to decide who should represent and rule them, rather than having state institutions decide the fate of the country and its citizens. "Those who work within their defined responsibilities will earn respect and honour from the people," he said, adding that those who crossed their limits would face resistance and chaos.

Former senator Khokhar said people's lives had been ruined by the suppression of opposition. "When you push the opposition against the wall, people themselves rise and assume the role of opposition," he said, citing the example of Azad Kashmir, where an elected government was deposed.

Later, a TTAP delegation, led by Mr Achakzai and Allama Nasir Abbas, visited Minar-i-Pakistan and spoke to journalists. Local authorities allowed the delegation to enter the historic site but barred its workers and supporters who chanted slogans against the Punjab government.

Speaking on the occasion, Mr Achakzai called on the people to take to the streets on Feb 8 to stand against oppression and fascism and restore true democracy, as envisaged in the Lahore Resolution. He said anyone who suspends or alters the Constitution is liable to punishment under Article 6.

Allama Nasir Abbas said the delegation had come to Minar-i-Pakistan to send a message that the country belongs to its people, and that everyone must come forward to save it from the clutches of oppressors. He asserted that the fascists would ultimately be defeated by the people of Pakistan.

Mustafa Nawaz Khokar said the Punjab government had effectively turned Iqbal Park into a "no-go area" for the public on weekends, noting that the Pakistan Day Resolution was passed at the park.

The TTAP leaders also chanted slogans like "*Hum zulm mitanay niklay hein, aao hmaray saath chalo*".

The TTAP delegation also met people on city streets in the night and urged them to join the movement, close shops and observe a wheel-jam on Feb 8. They also distributed pamphlets prepared by the PTI Punjab across city streets, roads and at people's residences.

The delegation also visited Mazar-i-Iqbal and Bibi Pakdaman to pay homage.

Raids, clash in three KP districts

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gunmen opened fire on him.

Police and residents said the attack took place in Mena Bazaar, about 25 kilometres from Khar, the district headquarters. War Mamund SHO Aslam Khan said the official, identified as Saifur Rehman, 40, died while being shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital, Khar.

JUI-F leader dies of wounds

Separately, a senior Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) leader and district president of Wafaqul Madaris Al-Arabia, Maulana Sultan Muhammad Wazir, died on Saturday after sustaining injuries in a bomb blast near a madrassa in Wana bazaar a day earlier. Police said an explosive device went off near a religious seminary in the Konra Cheena area of Wana in Lower South Waziristan, leaving Mr Wazir critically wounded. He was shifted towards Dera Ismail Khan for treatment but died on the way, officials said.

Lower South Waziristan DPO Muhammad Tahir Shah Wazir said investigations were underway.

JUI-F chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman condemned the attack, saying it was not only an assault on an individual but on "a moderate, peaceful and democratic ideology".

He said the repeated targeting of religious scholars in South Waziristan was alarming and required urgent attention from the state. Party leaders reiterated their commitment to peaceful political struggle, religious harmony, democratic values and constitutional supremacy.

In a separate incident in Upper South Waziristan, peace committee chief Qadeem Khan sustained minor injuries when an improvised explosive device targeted his vehicle in the Barwand area of Serwekai tehsil, police said.

DPO Arshad Khan said the vehicle was damaged in the blast and the injured was shifted to a local hospital, where he was reported to be out of danger. Police cordoned off the area, collected evidence and launched a search for the attackers.

With input from Khyber, Bajaur and South Waziristan

ANP plans multiparty moot in support of Grand Alliance

By Muhammad Akbar Notezai

QUETTA: Awami National Party (ANP) Balochistan President Asghar Khan Achakzai on Saturday expressed support for the demands of the Grand Alliance and announced that a multiparty conference would be held on Jan 22 to protest against the government's treatment of its employees.

Speaking at a press conference alongside party leaders Sanaullah Kakar, Shan Alam, and others, Mr Achakzai strongly criticised the provincial government for what he described as an unjust crackdown on political activists and Grand Alliance workers.

He said raids on homes, arrests, and the inclusion of activists' names in the Fourth Schedule were inappropriate and undemocratic practices. Mr Achakzai added that while two provinces of the country were enjoying relative peace, the other two, including Balochistan, were facing instability, yet no serious efforts were being made to restore peace.

He said ANP's parliamentary members stood firmly with the Grand Alliance and demanded that the government honour its commitments made to employees. He accused the provincial government of pushing more than 232,000 employees "against the wall" while focusing only on protecting its own interests.

Calling the present assembly "illegitimate," Mr Achakzai alleged that political divisions were being deliberately created at the government level. He claimed that after political workers, at least 38 more individuals, including professors, had been arrested, and questioned the rationale behind retaliatory actions against employees, including raids on their homes.

DC office staffer shot dead in Kachhi

By Ali Jan Mangi

DERA MURAD JAMALI: An official of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Kachhi district was shot dead by unidentified armed men in Dhadar on Saturday.

According to police, Babu Nisar Ahmed Hambi was passing through Rind Ali Bazaar when assailants opened fire on him, killing him on the spot. The attackers fled the scene immediately after the shooting.

Police reached the site soon after receiving information and shifted the body to the district hospital. Officials said the deceased had sustained multiple bullet wounds.

Police said Mr Hambi was employed at the deputy commissioner's office. The motive behind the killing was not immediately known, but investigators said an old enmity could be a possible cause.

Further investigation was under way, while no arrests had been made till the filing of this report.

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